



SENATOR

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E-Newsletter - 32nd District, Lake Forest Park

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32nd Legislative District

May 8, 2009

Well, after 105 days of public hearings, negotiations and votes, we came up with a budget that keeps us within our state's resources. This budget does not reflect my values because of its cuts to our vulnerable communities like seniors, developmentally disabled, young people, etc. However, we were able to use federal stimulus funds and one-time transfers to stave off the deepest of the proposed cuts. It's a budget nobody is happy with, but one that was necessary to deal with the horrible decline in state revenue as a result of the global economic meltdown. Hopefully, we will see an improved economy within the next year.

There was talk this session about increasing the sales tax by 0.3% (which would amount to 30 cents on a \$100 purchase) to maintain funding for our health care safety net. By law, all tax increases have to be approved by a majority of voters. However, polling showed that people in several districts are not willing to pay more in taxes to provide these services. Polling also showed disapproval of a personal or corporate income tax, although studies indicate that our reliance on a regressive sales tax makes us the state with the most unfair tax system for lower and middle income taxpayers in the US. We'll have to see what happens with these tax proposals in the future.

Feel free to contact me if you have questions about the outcome of specific bills from the recently completed legislative session.

NO SPECIAL SESSION—YAY!

As usual, we were working down to the wire on the final day of the legislative session, Sunday, April 26. By midnight the Senate had finished passing all bills necessary to implement the budget, but the House ran into a stalemate and couldn't agree upon a few final bills.

The Governor has decided not to call us back into a short special session to get these particular budget-related bills passed, since agreements could not be reached after several meetings. I'm happy because truly bad legislation can come back during any special session and we only have 9 months until we return to Olympia anyway.

EDUCATION

With the passage of ESHB 2261, we made much-needed progress towards redefining what constitutes “basic education” for the first time in over 30 years. By laying out a 10-year plan to create and pay for quality schools, this bill helps prioritize funding for our schools and acknowledges that teachers are being asked to work in an environment that has changed dramatically over the past several decades. While this bill didn’t please everyone, I see it as an important first step.

Also, I’m grateful that funding for K-12 and higher education turned out to be much better than we first expected. Higher ed is being cut 7% for the four year institutions and 6% for the community colleges, not the proposed 20-30%. And for K-12, the statewide average reduction is only 2.6% per district (reductions for school districts in our area are as follows: Edmonds, 2.7%; Lake Washington, 3.1%; Northshore, 3.5%; Shoreline, 2.8%).

Yes, tuition will likely go up and class sizes for grades 5+ will increase, but believe me, the budget could have been much worse for education.

ACTION IN THE COMMITTEE I CHAIR

A bill to expand rights & responsibilities of **registered domestic partners** came through the committee I’m chair of--the Senate Government Operations & Elections Committee. SB 5688 builds on legislation first passed in 2007 and extends the remaining rights and responsibilities in state law. Any benefits with a fiscal impact (pensions, etc.) are delayed until 2014 due to our state’s budget deficit.

We passed HB 1517 to allow **felon voting rights** to be restored once a felon has served his/her sentence, is no longer on probation, and is making efforts to pay restitution. Without this legislation, felons who are no longer in state custody are required to pay off **all** restitution charges and other court fees **before** being able to vote. This creates an economic disparity—those who can afford it get their voting rights restored while others take a lifetime to pay off their debt. By gaining back the right to vote, ex-felons are more likely to re-engage with the community. However, be assured that they will still be required to complete all restitution obligations.

A few budget highlights specific to the 32nd Legislative District:

Our district received funding for:

- \$500,000 for a new Park and Ride lot in Lake Forest Park
- \$150,000 for flooding mitigation for the Northshore Fire District
- \$2.1 million for a variety of maintenance & preservation projects at Shoreline Community College
- Kenmore-based Kenmore Air received a tax exemption to allow them to stay competitive with other commuter airlines and provide more in-state service

I’ll check in again during this interim. Have a wonderful spring and summer. As always, feel free to contact me if you have questions about specific bills or issues.

Take care,

Darlene

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